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EGY104165.E

Egypt: Situation and treatment of Christians; availability of state protection

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Sources state that Christians constitute approximately 8 to 12 percent of Egypt's population (US 13 Sept. 2011, 2). According to the US Central Intelligence Agency *World Factbook*, Coptic Christians make up 9 percent of the population, while other Christians constitute 1 percent of a total population of approximately 84 million (US 2 July 2012). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for July 2010 to December 2010*, Christians live dispersed throughout Egypt, but mostly in Upper Egypt in the south of the country, and parts of Cairo and Alexandria (ibid. 13 Sept. 2011, 2). The report adds that the rest of the population consists of approximately 90 percent Sunni Muslim, 1 percent Shia Muslim, and a very small Jewish and Bahai population (ibid.).

2. Legal Status

Egypt's state religion is Islam (Freedom House 2012a; US 13 Sept. 2011, 1). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, Egypt's legislation is drawn from principles of Sharia law (ibid.). The report adds that although the constitution includes principles of religious freedom, in practice this is not being followed, and the government's respect for religious freedom is "poor" (ibid.). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are not recognized by the government and the latter are monitored by government authorities (US 13 Sept. 2011, 2, 9, 21).

3. Violence Against Christians

Several 2012 sources report on an increase of sectarian tension (Freedom House 2012a; CIHRS [2012], 40; AI 2012) and clashes (ibid.; CIHRS [2012], 40). Amnesty International (AI) indicates that violence against Copts and their churches "appeared to increase" after the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) took power [in February 2011 (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b)] (AI 2012). The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), an independent NGO which works on human rights and democracy (CIHRS n.d.), reports on the "threat of civil war looming on the horizon" (20 Oct. 2011).

Several sources report on the destruction of Christian property (EIPR 12 Feb. 2012; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b; US 13 Sept. 2011, 20), including the torching of churches (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b; MRG 28 June 2012, 196; CIHRS [2012], 102; AI 2012), Christians' homes (EIPR 12 Feb. 2012; CSW 25 May 2012), and Christians' businesses (ibid.; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b). Examples include the burning of "scores of Christian homes and businesses" during sectarian clashes in April 2011 (CSW 25 May 2012), and the burning of a Christian man's homes in November 2010 for allegedly flirting with a Muslim girl (AFP 1 Jan. 2011).

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) reported 10 major attacks on Copts in 2011 (28 June 2012, 195). According to a speech by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's chairwoman to the 2012 Coptic Solidarity Conference, "violent sectarian attacks" in 2011, for which Copts were the "primary target," resulted in the death of approximately 100 people, which exceeds the death toll from sectarian clashes over the past 10 years combined (US 16 July 2012). Numerous sources reported on several incidents of violence against Christians, including the following examples from 2010-2011:

- In January 2010, on Coptic Christmas Eve, in Nagaa Hammadi [Upper Egypt], six Christians were killed in a drive-by shooting (MRG 6 July 2011, 213; *Daily News Egypt* 14 Jan. 2010);
- On 7 September 2010, in Wadi Rayan, Fayoum governorate, security forces clashed with monks at a Coptic Orthodox monastery resulting in the injury of three monks (US 13 Sept. 2011, 19);
- On 13 March 2010, an attack on a Coptic church located in Marsa Matruh, in the north of the country, resulted in the injury of 19 Christians and 4 Muslims (US 13 Sept. 2011, 20);
- On 1 January 2011, in Alexandria, a bomb exploded at a Coptic church (US 13 Sept. 2011, 1; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b). The number of casualties reported by sources ranges from 21 (MRG Apr. 2011) to 23 (International Crisis Group 24 Feb. 2011, 2; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b), with the number of injured Christians close to a hundred (US 13 Sept. 2011, 1);
- On 11 January 2011, on a train near Salamat [Upper Egypt], an off-duty police officer shot six (International Crisis Group 24 Feb. 2011, 2) or seven (*Dawn* 17 Jan. 2011) Christians, killing a 71-year-old person (ibid.; International Crisis Group 24 Feb. 2011, 2). According to *Dawn*, the shooter "reportedly checked that the passengers had crucifixes tattooed on their right wrists, a customary practice of Coptic Christians" (*Dawn* 17 Jan. 2011);
- In March 2011, sources report on the burning or demolition of a church in Atfih, south of Cairo (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b; MRG 28 June 2012, 196; CIHRS [2012], 101), which led to sectarian clashes resulting in the death of 13 people and the injury of 140 people (CIHRS [2012], 101). These clashes reportedly occurred in Cairo (ibid.; MRG 28 June 2012, 196; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b);
- In April 2011, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a Christian organization dedicated to working on religious freedom (CSW n.d.), sectarian clashes occurred between Muslims and Christians, resulting in the death of two Muslims and one Christian (25 May 2012);
- In May 2011, in the Imbaba neighbourhood in Cairo, sectarian violence near a church led to the death of 12 (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b; MRG 28 June 2012, 196) to 15 people (AI 2012; CIHRS [2012], 101) while 242 people were injured (ibid.).

4. Conversion

Sources state that conversion from Islam to Christianity is prohibited (MRG 6 July 2011, 213; US 13 Sept. 2011, 3) and that Muslim converts to Christianity have faced arrest (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012a, 27; US 13 Sept. 2011, 1) and detention (ibid.). Human Rights Watch states that, under President Mubarak, authorities arrested converts to Christianity under Article 98(f) of the penal code, which criminalizes the promotion or advocacy of "extremist ideologies...with a view toward stirring up sedition, disparaging or showing contempt for any divinely-revealed religion, or prejudicing national unity and social harmony," and carries a penalty of 5 years in prison and a fine of 1,000 Egyptian Pounds [approximately C\$168 (XE 25 July 2012)] (Jan. 2012, 26-27).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for July 2010 to December 2010* indicates that some converts from Islam to Christianity have also faced: routine and "hostile surveillance" by security forces, harassment, travel bans, rape, physical and mental abuse in detention, and pressure to revert back to Islam, and indicates that there have been "occasional reports that police persecuted" converts from Islam to Christianity (13 Sept. 2011, 1, 3, 13, 14, 17, 18). The US *International Religious Freedom Report* also reports on the administrative detention and physical abuse of the spouses of converts (13 Sept. 2011, 17, 18). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, although it is not illegal, proselytizing is restricted by the government and people have been harassed and detained for proselytizing (US 13 Sept. 2011, 4). *The Huffington Post* reports that a Muslim convert to Christianity was imprisoned for 9 days for distributing Christian pamphlets (19 June 2012).

5. Discrimination

According to MRG, Christians face discrimination in public services (6 July 2011, 213). MRG states that this is facilitated by national identity cards (6 July 2011, 213) which, sources say, show that an individual is Christian (ibid.; US 13 Sept. 2011, 9).

5.1 Employment

Sources report on discrimination against Christians in accessing employment (*Huffington Post* 19 June 2012; ACN 11 July 2012), particularly in the public sector (Freedom House 2012a; US 13 Sept. 2011, 15). Sources state that Christians are underrepresented in senior military positions (US 21 June 2012, 3; AI 29 June 2012, 15) and the police force (US 13 Sept. 2011, 15), and not represented at all on the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) (US 24 May 2012, 22). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for July 2010 to December 2010*, there are no Christians serving as presidents or deans of public universities (US 13 Sept. 2011, 15). However, US Congressional Research Service states that Coptic Christians play a "prominent role" in the private sector (US 21 June 2012, 3). *Think Africa Press*, an online London-based magazine (*Think Africa Press* n.d.), states that Christians are prevented from obtaining promotions and high positions (16 July 2012).

5.2 Education

Sources indicate that Christians face discrimination in education (MRG Apr. 2011; *National Post* 22 June 2012). MRG says that Coptic students face discrimination in university admissions (Apr. 2011), and the global ambassador for the World Evangelical Alliance, writing in *The National Post*, states that Christian students often face discrimination while attending state schools (22 June 2012). Christian students are prohibited from attending the public institution Al Azhar University (US 13 Sept. 2011, 15).

6. State Protection

The *Huffington Post* reports on the emigration of 100,000 Coptic Christians from Egypt in 2011 (19 June 2012). Sources state that Christians fear the new government in Egypt because of its longstanding ties with the Muslim Brotherhood (CSW 25 June 2012; MRG 28 June 2012, 194).

Sources report that in 2010 and 2011, state authorities have used violence against Christians (Freedom House 2012a; MRG 28 June 2012, 196). Freedom House also states that SCAF has engaged in violence against Christians (Freedom House 2012b). Incidents of violence against Christians by state authorities include the following:

- In October 2011, in Cairo, a demonstration organized by Coptic Christians over the destruction of a church in Aswan was violently dispersed by the military (US 21 June 2012, 11; MRG 28 June 2012, 194; CIHRS 20 Oct. 2011). The military fired live ammunition and ran over protestors with their vehicles (Freedom House 2012a; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b; CIHRS 20 Oct. 2011). Statistics on the number of people killed range from 24 (US 21 June 2012, 11) to 28 (Freedom House 2012a), and the number of people injured ranges from 200 (US 21 June 2012, 11; AFP 14 June 2012) to 300 (CIHRS 20 Oct. 2011). Sources state that the majority of the people killed were Coptic Christians (CIHRS [2012], 56; AFP 14 June 2012);
- In November 2010, sources report on clashes between Coptic protestors and authorities regarding church construction in Giza, Cairo (MRG July 2011, 213; US 13 Sept. 2011, 19). The US *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that 2 Coptic Christians were killed, and 68 people were injured including 18 police officers (US 13 Sept. 2011, 19). The report also states that there are unconfirmed reports of police abuse against some of the 154 detainees that participated in the riots (ibid.). Information corroborating the police abuse of 154 detainees could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for July 2010 to December 2010* indicates that according to human rights advocates, after sectarian attacks, state authorities often detain Coptic Christians and hold them without charges or threaten them with false charges (13 Sept. 2011, 21). Sources report that 12 Christians were sentenced to life imprisonment in May 2012 in connection to sectarian violence, while the eight Muslims charged in the case were acquitted (Human Rights Watch 16 July 2012; CSW 25 May 2012). Some of CSW's sources described this case as a "serious miscarriage of justice" (ibid.).

Some sources indicate that the state has not adequately protected its Christian population (EIPR 12 Feb. 2012; AI 29 June 2012, 15; US 16 July 2012). Sources report on incidents when security forces did not intervene during incidents of violence (EIPR 14 May 2011; MRG 28 June 2012, 196; CSW 25 May 2012), or failed to take preventive measures to stop violence from occurring

(MRG 28 June 2012, 196; International Crisis Group 24 Feb. 2011, 2).

Several sources report on "impunity" for perpetrators of violence against Christians (CSW 25 May 2012; US 16 July 2012; US 13 Sept. 2011, 1). Sources also report on attacks on Christian property that have not been investigated (US 13 Sept. 2011, 24; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2012b).

Sources report that in several cases, the government did not prosecute offenders of violence against Christians (US 13 Sept. 2011, 1; AI 29 June 2012, 15). Instead, following sectarian violence, the state prefers to use "reconciliation" sessions (US 13 Sept. 2011, 1; AI 29 June 2012; EIPR 12 Feb. 2012). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for July 2010 to December 2010* indicates that these reconciliation sessions "contributed to a climate of impunity that encouraged further assaults" (US 13 Sept. 2011, 1).

6.1 Church Construction, Reconstruction and Repairs

According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report*, in order to build new churches, Christians must obtain approval through a presidential decree, which includes requirements such as that the neighbouring Muslim community must approve, and the church must be at least 100 meters away from mosques (13 Sept. 2011, 7). MRG similarly states that the neighbouring Muslim community must endorse church repairs (28 June 2012, 195). Sources report on the delay and denial of permits to build or repair churches (Freedom House 2012a; US 13 Sept. 2011, 8, 11).

In 2005, a presidential decree was issued, which delegates approval of church repairs or expansions to regional governors (AI 29 June 2012, 16; US 13 Sept. 2011, 8). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for July 2010 to December 2010*, even when permits are granted, at times security forces have blocked the repairs or construction of churches (US 13 Sept. 2011, 11, 12).

Amnesty International indicates that churches are closed down or destroyed for being built without "the right permission" (AI 29 June 2012, 16). Similarly, the US *International Religious Freedom Report* indicates that Christian institutions were destroyed, including a Coptic cemetery in Maghagha, Minhya governorate in March 2009; and a building at the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Marsa Matrouh which was demolished by security forces in April 2009 for exceeding the approved height (US 13 Sept. 2011, 22). The report adds that sometimes the use of private dwellings for religious services are also shut down by local authorities (ibid., 8). Information corroborating the closure of private dwellings for religious services could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

6.2 Political Participation

Sources indicate that Christians are underrepresented in high levels of government (US 21 June 2012, 3; AI 29 June 2012, 15; MRG 6 July 2011, 213). In 2010, Christians held 2 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly (MRG 6 July 2011, 213; US 13 Sept. 2011, 15), and, as of December 31, 2010, there were 2 Christians in the 32-member cabinet (ibid.). According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011*, out of 27 governors, none of them belonged to a religious minority group (24 May

2012, 22). According to CIHRS, in the governorate of Qena, after a Coptic governor was appointed, there were several weeks of unrest and demonstrations which resulted in the replacement of the governor ([2012], 101).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources, including: Attempts to contact the following sources were unsuccessful: Academic Fellow in Religion and Politics, University of Scotland; activist and former newspaper publisher; Associate Professor at Trinity Western University; Egyptian Organization for Human Rights. A Political Science professor at the University of Guelph was unable to provide information for this Response.

Internet sites: BBC News; CBN News; Christian Solidarity International; *Daily News Egypt*; Ecol.net; Egypt — Ministry of Awqaf, Ministry of Defense and Military Production, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Solidarity and Justice; International Christian Concern; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

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